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HISTORY OF TELEGRAPHY IN W.A. PART 3.

Acknowledgement to Telecom.

The construction of the lines to Albany, Bunbury, York and Newcastle, (Toodyay), was done by The Electro Magnetic Telegraph Company, formed with a capital of \$24,000 and was completed by the end of 1872.

In 1872 the W. A. Government raised a loan of \$70,000, bought the Electro Magnetic Telegraph Company out for the original \$24,000 and arranged for immediate extensions to the lines.

In 1873, the above loan being exhausted, another \$200,000 was authorised and the loan raised in 1874, most of which came from Melbourne. It was earmarked for both rail and telegraph extension. Whether both proceeded conjunctively is a matter for further research.

The existing Perth Toodyay line was extended to Geraldton and became operational on 5th June, 1874.

Consistent with James Fleming's policy of training local operators as the lines progressed, a part aboriginal girl, Miss Helen Cooper, became the New Norcia Postmistress and Telegraphist, and later, owing to ill health, was replaced by the first full blood operator, Sarah, their salary being \$60 per annum.

Emma Clinch was the Berkshire Valley operator, Mrs. K. Cookes at Carnamah, Miss E. McPherson at Arrino, Eliza Water at Greenough Flats and Mary O'Neill in Dongara.

The Geraldton Northampton line opened on 5th April, 1878, preceding the Geraldton Northampton Railway by over 15 months when it opened on 26th July, 1879.

By the year 1880, there were 26 telegraph stations operating over 2,500 kilometres of wire and for 1880 alone, 44,610 private telegrams valued at \$6,152 had been transmitted plus another 26,440 official telegrams valued at \$2,052.

As previously mentioned, the Perth Eucla line was operational at 7.00. p.m. on 8th December, 1877.

As this line progressed eastward towards the advancing Port Augusta line westwards, telegrams were being despatched to the terminals of both lines, then conveyed over the intervening gaps by horse express, commencing on 15th August, 1877, until the lines were eventually joined at Eucla.

The same system had operated while closing the gap on the Port Augusta Darwin-overseas cable line.

NORTHAMPTON ROEBOURNE and COSSACK EXTENSION.

On 14th June, 1883, a survey party, consisting of Assistant Surveyor, Mr. Strickland, three men and thirteen horses left Perth and proceeded by easy stages via Victoria Plains, Irwin, Champion Bay (Geraldton) to Northampton, where they were met by H. Stuart Carey, Officer in Charge of Roebourne Telegraph Construction, on 22nd June.

Mr. Carey had departed Fremantle on board the S.S. Otway on 18th June, and disembarked at Champion Bay.

The fact that the survey party travelled overland from Perth suggests that there was no railway to help with transportation.

The first section, Northampton Hamelin Pool, 141 miles and 8 chains, (Mr. Carey's figures) commenced on 25th June, 1883, for the survey, and took almost 5 months, finishing on 15th December. This turned out to be the most difficult section of the entire 689 miles and 20 chains between Northampton and Roebourne, mainly because of lack of water and very inhospitable and mostly sandy country, especially north of the Murchison River. It took the construction party 8 months to complete.

After Hamelin Pool, use was made of the close proximity to the coast and the availability of sea transport, as was the case with the Albany Eucla line earlier.

The construction party arrived in Northampton on 17th August and commenced work on 20th. The first pole was erected by His Excellency the Governor, Sir F. Napier Broome, K.C.M.G. on 27th September, 1883, but as mentioned earlier, was not completed to Hamelin Pool until 21st April, 1884.

Construction commenced with the line starting at the old original Railway Station, which was also the Post and Telegraph Station. The line then followed along the west side of the main street and kept to the west of the main road to the Murchison and passing through Trevenson.

It crossed the Murchison River 64 miles out, near Mount Curious, with "a span of 350 feet and well above flood level."

Mindful of the fact that there was no established road north of the Murchison River and that the clearing along the line and the supply vehicles tracks could be adopted as a road, and the importance of stock feed and water in those days, Mr. Carey carefully noted wherever feed and water was available, including quantity and quality, type of country and even height above sea level.

In the Report he submitted to Parliament after completion of the work to Roebourne and the extension to Cossack, on 14th June, 1886, he made recommendations for Water and Camping Reserves for both travellers and linesmen, these having been surveyed by him as he progressed.

Mr. Carey comments on the section from Murchison River to Hamelin Pool, "The hardships endured on this part, Murchison to Hamelin Pool, both by men and horses, were most trying, and only those who have experienced it have any idea of the misery entailed on all hands carrying work out, in the summer months in this country."

He also comments, "It was here that the chief benefits of using camels in the construction were apparent, as the heavy sandhills made transport by teams almost impossible. On this section he also constructed and erected two tank houses, (later known as catchment tanks), one at the 95 mile mark and the other at the 115 mile.

After Hamelin Pool greater use was made of coastal landings for supply of materials, for which the Fremantle firm J. & W. Bateman were the contractors.

Some of these landings continued in use by stations and merchants long after the line was complete, being leased by the Harbour & Lights Dept., Gladstone, Maud's Landing and Fortescue were some.

The survey from Hamelin Pool to Gascoyne, (Carnarvon) took five months, delayed mostly by all the party getting measles, one at a time, whereas construction only took three months.

Gascoyne to Ashburton (Onslow) survey took 7 months and construction 12 months, this owing to the enormous job of transporting materials. By now they had 27 camels and 5 horse wagons, besides sub-contractors working for them and he comments, "...thus showing the great advantage of a coast line where there are harbours in the construction."

Carey himself went aboard supply vessels and helped reconnoiter landing stages on many occasions.

It was on this section that Assistant Surveyor Mr. Strickland had to return to Perth with serious eye trouble.

The complete survey from Northampton to Robeourne took one year and 11 months and the construction 2 years and 1½ months.

Mr. Carey comments, "I very casually mention that not one of the party that started with me on the survey went through to Roebourne. Three were compelled to leave on account of their eyes, and one very ill and weak from a low fever, and one discharged. Mr. Parrish (Overseer), and Mr. Brown, (Field Operator), who started with construction, came through."

"After completing the line from Robeourne to Cossack, I made survey for tramway, ground plan for both towns, and returned to Fremantle per "Otway" after an absence of 2 years and 4 months."

An interesting example of his meticulous attention to detail to ensure the line's longevity was his selection of the route across the marsh into Cossack and is something I have never understood why roadmakers later ignored when they built the existing causeway in. Mr. Carey's own words illustrate the point best.

In his report he says, "It (the line) then crosses the marsh at the old road crossing, before the present causeway was built, this being the highest part of the marsh or crown of same as the tides coming around on the East side and on West side of Cossack meet here, consequently causing a certain amount of siltage on this part and from appearance should say the marsh was making here from the deposit of sand silting up. The marsh here is sufficiently firm of itself to bear traffic, and is where teams crossed before causeway was built."

He goes on to say, "One great advantage of this part of the marsh over part where the causeway is built is there are no creeks, in fact no wash whatever, as tides meet here when they are high, consequently no current, whereas there is about 3'6" of water over the causeway at high tide with very strong rush of water. Again, after "Willy Willy" this route along crown of marsh is passable on horseback, whereas the causeway has to be repaired, generally before traffic can go along it, even if bridges are not washed away."

This was also the line he surveyed for the tramway, which was built along it, the embankment still being there and it always annoys me to hear or read what would be old historians claiming it followed the existing causeway. It crossed the marsh there and joined the old Roebourne Point Samson railway near a small hill with a tunnel driven into it to serve as a dynamite magazine

I have ridden an old twin cylinder Harley Davidson with a foot clutch and fuel tank mounted hand gear shift over it many times.

full names



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